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## Analysis of Grammatical Interference and its Social Acceptability in Pakistani Context

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### Abstract

The paper aims to look into the first language grammatical interference in the written texts of the non-native speakers of English language and its social acceptability in the Pakistani context. Pakistan is a country of bilinguals, therefore the influence of one's mother tongue on other languages especially English becomes crucial in this context. The linguistic outcomes based on the grammatical interference show the coining of new words with the combination of different borrowed grammatical features. The paper analyzes the grammatical interference and the factors that facilitate the social acceptability of the affected linguistic outcomes. For the purpose of study, one hundred English text samples of the undergraduate students who are non-native speakers of English language were examined. It has been observed that due to strong language contact of Urdu (first language) with English (second language), the first language grammatical interference does affect the written expressions of the non-native speakers of English language and encourage the coining of new words. This contact-induced process is further reinforced by the immense exposure to technology and the wide use of internet. The study indicates that borrowing grammatical features from one language and converting them in other not only encourage the coining of new words but also show that its social acceptability can lead to the emergence of a new language over the period of time.

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### 1. Introduction

Languages change as an outcome of language contact and lead to linguistic changes resulting from the coexistence of the two equivalent forms. Language contact is a phenomenon which may be considered neither bad nor good from linguists' point of view. It lays emphasis on the attitude of the speakers which is not always neutral.

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The contact typically involves bilinguals and their outputs indicate that the two forms which coexist compete and dominate over the other, show the shape of the language in contact.

Contact among bilinguals can lead to a variety of outcomes; with adoption of features of pronunciation, modification of grammar or, borrowing of words. Other outcomes may include the emergence of a new language based on the intensity and duration of the language contact and its dynamics; communicative function, the degree of similarity between languages spoken, and socio-political status of the language in contact.

The transfer of linguistic features from one language to another due to contact is natural. The transfer has influenced languages in different levels. For example, in the case of English, it has been observed that the English language has borrowed a large vocabulary from French, Latin, Greek, and many other languages in the course of its history. In this process of transfer, the speakers do not necessarily have to be in contact with these languages as these words can be learnt through information available in books and teachers pass on new vocabulary to other speakers via literature, religious texts, and, dictionaries. Nonetheless, there are situations of strong language contact which have led to the creation of new contact languages.

The main issues related to language contact are borrowing from other languages; linguistic convergence; language birth and language death. Schendl (2001) observes that speakers and languages in contact rarely enjoy equal status; politically, socially or economically. Causing the less prestigious group to be often deprived, frequently leading to language conflict between the speech communities.

One aspect of language contact is the use of distinct languages within the same community by bilingual or multilingual speakers leading to a high degree of convergence between very different languages (Trudgill, 1974b). This happens in the case of languages like Urdu, Marathi, and Kannada in the village of Kupwar in India (Thomason, 2000). In other situation of speech communities, the manipulation of two codes can lead to very complex structure of code alternation and code mixture.

It has been observed that contact-induced change may lead the non-native speakers of a language in contact to produce errors in second language. This aspect of error production takes us to the study of error analysis in second language acquisition. Errors arise because of lack of competence. Another representation of ‘imperfect learning’ and consequent shape of the language in contact can also be influenced by notion of Interlanguage development which refers to the intermediate state of language learning as having a third language system based on its own unique grammar; lexicon morphology and, syntax. According to Interlanguage theory the intermediate learning state is a platform where a learner integrates the new knowledge (Target Language) systematically with the previous knowledge (Mother Tongue) and restructures and reorganizes the new language (L2).

For the purpose of the study of analysing the grammatical interference and the factors that facilitate the social acceptability of the affected linguistic outcomes in Pakistani context, one hundred English essays, written by undergraduate students of FAST National University were examined. Since there is an extensive contact between Urdu and English; the purpose is to analyse the impact and identify the grammatical interferences to view them not as deviation from standard norms or linguistic rules, rather as a language variant and its acceptance in a given social context.

### *1.1. Objectives*

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the first language grammatical interference in the written texts of the non-native speakers of English language and its social acceptability in the Pakistani context.
- To investigate the issues of coinages, borrowing, contact-induced changes, due to grammatical interference.
- To analyse mother tongue (Urdu) interference in the use of Internet/SMS technology.

## 2. Literature Review

Language contact, according to Thomason (2001a) is “the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time,” referring to the situation which involves bilingual speakers communicating for essential purposes. Language contact is seen to be a process of interchange of linguistic forms from one language to the other. The globalization has encouraged language contact as it has become a necessity of people to be bilingual and use more than one language primarily for functional reasons.

Recent research analyses the phenomena of the interaction for more than two linguistic systems and their consequent influences on each other, indicating “different structural outcomes in the languages involved in contacts” (Myers-Scotton 2003). Contact induced change or interference has emerged from the study of historical linguistics where contact is often considered as the reason for any linguistic change and the internalizing process of rules of more than one language. The cognitive activity involved in such a process is seen to be shedding the burden of remembering and producing the two different grammatical forms based on different grammatical rules by producing a new state of language.

According to (Thomason 2001a), ‘interference’ is a typical contact induced which involves a direct transfer and inculcation of linguistic features of one language into the other and possible adjustments are made to suit the users intentions. Speakers in a language contact situation, tries to maintain their native language while incorporating in it the features of other language. Shifting to another language causes imperfect learning, subsequently enabling speaker commit errors connected to the process of shifting and producing output in the target language. Johanson (2002) proposes ‘code copying’ as the superordinate term, with ‘adoption’ and ‘imposition’ as two main types.

Different types of linguistic units that are transferred from one language to the other, according to Curnow (2001), include phonology, phonetics, morphology, grammatical forms, and all types related to discourse. Another addition to the linguistic units’ list includes contact-induced grammaticalization (Heine and Kuteva 2005).

Schendl (2002) explains three general types of explanation offered by historical linguists: functional explanation, psycholinguistic explanation and sociolinguistic explanation as to how and why do languages change, maintaining that “in spite of the long tradition of historical linguistics and recent research, there is still no generally accepted answer to the question of how and why languages change” (p.80). The lack of consensus among schools of linguistics over explanations and an understanding of “how we view language- as an autonomous system, as a psychological or biological fact or as a vehicle of communication which speakers use” is largely the reason why the issue remains inconclusive. He further maintains that linguistic change “is not restricted to particular languages or generations, but a universal fact.” (p.5) contrasting the conservative linguists of past who regarded language “as growing organism with a stage of growth, brief moment of evolutionary perfection, and subsequent decay,” with those of contemporary linguist who have a “neutral or even positive attitude towards change”.

Research suggests that that any part of language structure can be transferred from one language to the other, (Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Harris & Campbell 1995; Aikhenvald, 2002) also referred by Matras (2009) as “the need of modification.” There is at least one domain of language use and language structure where a significant constraint on linguistic transfer from one language to another can be observed, namely the domain of grammatical meanings and structures (Heine and Kuteva, 2005).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Sample

For the purpose of the study, one hundred English essays written by the students enrolled in the English Writing module of Computer Science Degree program were used to analyse the contact-induced changes and grammatical interference that occur in their writing. The essay topic was; *Preferred means of Communication* (300-350 words).

### 3.2. Data collection

Data of grammatical interference is organized as:

- Coinages based on borrowed grammatical features
- Contact –induced changes

### 3.2.1. Coinages based on borrowed grammatical features

The essays contain examples (Table.1) of adding prefixes and suffixes of one language to the word of another language to form a coinage.

Table 1: Coined Words, Errors, Types and Descriptions

| Coinages  | Types         | Description   |
|-----------|---------------|---|
| Callien   | Interlanguage | Urdu plural suffix -“ien,” instead of using ‘s’ to make it plural |
| Leaderaan | Interlanguage | Urdu plural suffix –“aan” instead of using ‘s’ to make it plural  |
| Ratafy    | Interlanguage | English plural suffix- “fy,” “Rata,” in Urdu means memorizing     |

### 3.2.2. Contact-induced changes

The contact- induced changes in the text show the examples of spelling error, redundancy and literal translation of mother tongue (Table 2). Further the examples of reduced spellings indicate the influence of chatting/SMS in the written expressions of the students.

Table 2: Contact- induced changes- Types and Description

| Grammatical Interference | Errors                               | Description   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Facayliti                | Spelling error                       | Lack of equivalence in L2, ‘faculty,’ mispronounced when written in mother tongue |
| Again time sorry...      | Literal translation of mother tongue | “aik bar phir maazrat” is “again time sorry,” instead of ‘sorry once again.’      |
| “Return me back my pen”  | Redundancy                           | “mera kalam mujhe wapas kro,”   |
| Nite - cald              | Literal translation (MT)             |   |
|                          | Spelling errors                      | Reduced spellings due to sms/internet chatting influence                          |

Table 3: Mother Tongue Interference in the use of Internet Chatting and SMS

| Examples                        | Roman alphabet   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| When will you come?             | SMS: tum kab aao gay?  |
| Is your meeting cancelled?      | SMS: kia tumhari meeting cancel ho gayee hay?/<br>kia tumhri meetn cancl ho gye hay? |
| نیب سپریمکورت - پراسیکیوٹر جنرل | Prosecutor general- Supreme court- NAB   |

## 4. Discussion

Among the coinages the most interesting ones are those where a singular form of a language in contact has been made either plural or a modifier with the addition of suffix of another language. For example in Urdu language, there is no substitute for a word “Call”, Pakistanis have borrowed it from English language and use Urdu plural suffix “ien” to make it plural. It is an example of Interlanguage process, since the non-native speaker of English language does not find a corresponding counterpart in his/her mother tongue and transfers inappropriate properties of L1 into L2. Literal translation of Urdu into English causes redundancy and incorrect sentence structure as per L2 grammatical rules.

The words which lack equivalences in mother tongue e.g. ‘faculty,’ ‘prosecutor,’ when written in Urdu language, are pronounced differently. Consequently, the same words when written in English language are spelt as pronounced in Urdu language.

The influence of technology is another factor which encourages grammatical interference. The use of reduced spelt words such as “cald,” (called) or “nite” (night) are opening a new area for researchers to investigate whether such an influence be considered positive or negative especially when there is an evidence that the non-native speaker of language in contact has the knowledge of the correct spellings and yet commits errors for convenience purposes. An Urdu word consists of half forms and therefore, it is difficult to write text messages. The usual practice is to use Roman alphabets to write Urdu as these alphabets are simpler to use. The practice has impacted the writing skills.

The socio-political status of the language in contact in the case of English does influence its successful learning by the non-native speakers. Naturally, the language of the dominant culture either influences the languages of the subordinate cultures, or it creates a new variety of its own. The non-native speakers’ attitude toward English also affects the learning and it has been observed that participants attitude towards learning is casual. The attitude shows avoidance in the use of restricted forms, articulating the learners’ desire for freedom to create a variety to suits their needs.

The process of internalizing linguistics rules of two different languages is unique as it provides a platform to non-native speaker to develop a new grammatical structure by modifying and adjusting two different linguistic forms to meet the communicative needs. The sociolinguistic setting along with the structure and communicative needs and intentions contribute to the creation of a new variety.

## 5. Conclusion

The study shows that the lack of linguistic knowledge of language in contact has led the participants produce a language resulting from interferences of mother tongue and deviation from set linguistic norms. Although considered imperfect, but such linguistic outcomes have led to the simplification of linguistic items to meet the learners communicative needs and minimize the cognitive burden of remembering two different linguistic systems.

The ability of the contact-induced changes to convey the intended meaning has encouraged the tendency of overlooking errors by the non-native speaker of a language in contact. The repeated instances and their social acceptability strongly indicate that for the non-native speakers, such expressions should be looked at with positivity. Instead of labeling the occurrences as examples of imperfect learning the process should be considered as a creative activity for building a new language system.

The recent trend which has emerged in the use of English language by Pakistani speakers is more of building a new language; perhaps a new variety of English with a linguistic structure aims to bring convenience in using and comprehensible in performing its social functions. What need to be investigated are its future directions and the question of its standardization to be given a status of an emerging language in the Pakistani context.

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